

INTELLIGENT IP RELAY

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention is directed, in general, to wireless communications interfaces to packet networks and, more specifically, to optimizing packet sizes for wireless communications with a packet network node.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 Current implementations of the transmission control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP) network standard within wireless environments run with certain configurations of variables relating to the transmission control protocol (TCP) portion of the standard such as timeouts, window sizes, window scale, and the like. Optimization of such transmission control protocol variables, however, does little to benefit other protocols running on top of the Internet protocol (IP) layer, such as real-time transport protocol (RTP).

20

 Moreover, wireless links often employ a maximum transmission unit (MTU) which is smaller than those

employed for hard-wired or land line network connections since radio frequency (RF) transmission is lossy, more prone to corruption and dropouts. For example, wireless links typically employ a maximum transmission unit size of between about 128 and 300 bytes, while land line (Ethernet) networks employ an average maximum transmission unit size of about 1,500 bytes, and may employ a maximum transmission unit size of up to 8 kilobytes (KB). However, the maximum transmission unit size for data streams including a wireless link is usually set to the smaller size throughout the entire communications path.

A small maximum transmission unit or packet size implies lower effective end-to-end bandwidth utilization for the data stream. Smaller packets also tend to congest the network hosts and all intermediate routers, and the destination host incurs higher processor utilization to process (more numerous) smaller Internet protocol packets.

When implementations of the Internet Protocol Version 6 (IPv6) network standard, which are currently being incrementally deployed, become ubiquitous, intermediate nodes in a network will NOT perform fragmentation and re-assembly of large packets into smaller packets and vice versa. All hosts connected to such an IPv6 network will

therefore be required to implement "path maximum transmission unit discovery" to identify (and employ) the maximum transmission unit size which the desired data stream path is capable of sustaining. For systems with a wireless link, this requirement will lead to lower effective bandwidth utilization and other problems as described above.

There is, therefore, a need in the art for a system of intelligent Internet protocol packet relay for data streams including a wireless link.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

To address the above-discussed deficiencies of the prior art, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide, for use in a communications path including a wireless link to a packet network not having packet aggregation and fragmentation at intermediate nodes therein, a proxy at the interface between a wireless communications system and a packet network that intercepts all traffic between the wireless communications systems and the packet network and re-formats the intercepted traffic according to an optimal maximum transmission unit size between the interception point and the final destination, excluding the wireless link from computation of the optimal path maximum transmission unit size. Typically this will result in packets from the wireless communications system being aggregated into a larger maximum transmission unit size, while packets from the packet network are fragmented into a smaller maximum transmission unit size. Congestion at intermediate nodes within the packet network is reduced, while end-to-end bandwidth utilization and latency at the final destination are improved.

The foregoing has outlined rather broadly the features and technical advantages of the present invention so that those skilled in the art may better understand the detailed description of the invention that follows. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be described hereinafter that form the subject of the claims of the invention. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that they may readily use the conception and the specific embodiment disclosed as a basis for modifying or designing other structures for carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. Those skilled in the art will also realize that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention in its broadest form.

Before undertaking the DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION below, it may be advantageous to set forth definitions of certain words or phrases used throughout this patent document: the terms "include" and "comprise," as well as derivatives thereof, mean inclusion without limitation; the term "or" is inclusive, meaning and/or; the phrases "associated with" and "associated therewith," as well as derivatives thereof, may mean to include, be included within, interconnect with, contain, be contained

within, connect to or with, couple to or with, be communicable with, cooperate with, interleave, juxtapose, be proximate to, be bound to or with, have, have a property of, or the like; and the term "controller" means any device, system or part thereof that controls at least one operation, whether such a device is implemented in hardware, firmware, software or some combination of at least two of the same. It should be noted that the functionality associated with any particular controller may be centralized or distributed, whether locally or remotely. Definitions for certain words and phrases are provided throughout this patent document, and those of ordinary skill in the art will understand that such definitions apply in many, if not most, instances to prior as well as future uses of such defined words and phrases.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention, and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like numbers designate like objects, and in which:

FIGURE 1 depicts a communications system including a wireless link to a packet network according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIGURE 2 depicts a high level flowchart for a process of handling traffic between a wireless link and a packet network according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

FIGURES 1 and 2, discussed below, and the various embodiments used to describe the principles of the present invention in this patent document are by way of illustration only and should not be construed in any way to limit the scope of the invention. Those skilled in the art will understand that the principles of the present invention may be implemented in any suitably arranged device.

FIGURE 1 depicts a communications system including a wireless link to a packet network according to one embodiment of the present invention. Communications system 100 includes a remote station 101 (e.g., a mobile telephone, a wireless personal digital assistant (PDA), or the like) coupled by a wireless communications link 102 to a packet network 103, which is an Internet protocol packet network in the exemplary embodiment. Wireless link 102 includes a wireless communications channel 104 from remote station 101 to a base station 105 and a land line connection 106 from the base station (through a mobile switching center or the like) to the packet network 103, and may employ any suitable wireless communications

standard permitting communications with a packet network such as code division multiple access (CDMA).

Packet network 103 in the exemplary embodiment is an internal network for a wireless communications carrier enterprise, and includes a connection to the Internet 107. The communications path between remote station 101 and the destination (or source, for downstream data traffic) includes wireless link 102 and terminates at the destination, which will typically be within the Internet 107 but may alternatively be within internal carrier packet network 103.

In the present invention, the communications path between remote station 101 and the destination (which is either within internal carrier packet network 103 or is reached through internal carrier packet network 103) includes a packet relay controller 108 between the wireless link 102 and the remainder of the communications path. Packet relay controller 108, an Internet protocol packet relay in the exemplary embodiment, preferably consists of an Internet protocol level proxy which intercepts all wireless Internet protocol traffic between the mobile station 101 and the packet network 103.

Packet relay controller 108 receives packets 109 from wireless link 102 having a small maximum transmission unit size suitable for wireless communications and assembles the received packets 109 into packets 110 having a larger, optimal maximum transmission unit size. The optimal maximum transmission unit size is ascertained by path maximum transmission unit discovery between packet relay controller 108 and the final destination. Likewise, packet relay controller 108 fragments packets 110 received from the packet network 103 having the larger maximum transmission unit size into smaller packets 109 having the maximum transmission unit size suitable for wireless link 102 prior to forwarding the packets over wireless link 102.

In one sense, the packet relay controller 108 simply aggregates all Internet protocol flows from remote station 101 by re-computing the path maximum transmission unit after the first hop, the wireless link 102. By intercepting traffic for aggregation or fragmentation, packet relay controller 108 reduces congestion in the intermediate nodes within internal carrier packet network 103 and Internet 107 while improving end-to-end bandwidth utilization for the mobile station 101 and reducing latency

at the destination server (by reducing the required processing).

Packet relay controller 108 may be implemented within a base transmitter station (BTS) or a base switching center (BSC) for the carrier's wireless network, or within an inter-working function (IWF) module--the hardware and software which enable transmission of combined voice and data over a packet network--within the carrier's wireless network, which is typically at the interface between the carrier's wireless network and the carrier's internal packet network 103. Having a proxy level packet relay controller 108 within the inter-working function would be preferable for a service provider (carrier) since such an implementation results in fewer physical devices which need to be managed.

FIGURE 2 depicts a high level flowchart for a process of handling traffic between a wireless link and a packet network according to one embodiment of the present invention. The process 200 begins with detection of communications (e.g., a data stream) being initiated from a wireless link over a packet network (step 201). The path maximum transmission unit between an interception point--preferably at a point within the communications path close

to the wireless link and having a land line connection to the packet network--and the final destination within the packet network is discovered (step 202), and all traffic between the wireless link and the packet network is intercepted (step 203).

All intercepted traffic from the wireless link is re-formatted to employ the maximum transmission unit size for the portion of the communications path between the interception point and the final destination, while all intercepted traffic to the wireless link is re-formatted to employ the maximum transmission unit size suitable for the wireless link (step 204). The interception and reformatting of traffic continues until termination of the data stream is detected (step 205), at which time the process becomes idle (step 206) until another data stream between the wireless link and the packet network is initiated.

As Internet protocol services are increasingly deployed for wireless communications systems, performance and bandwidth become a critical issue. The present invention improves performance and bandwidth utilization in communications between a wireless device and a packet network server. Currently proposed optimizations for

Internet protocol implementations in wireless environments have not included the method of the present invention.

It is important to note that while the present invention has been described in the context of a fully functional network device, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the mechanism of the present invention is capable of being implemented and distributed in the form of a computer usable medium of instructions in a variety of forms, and that the present invention applies equally regardless of the particular type of signal bearing medium used to carry out the distribution. Examples include, but are not limited to: nonvolatile, hard-coded or programmable type mediums such as read only memories (ROMs) or erasable, electrically programmable read only memories (EEPROMs), recordable type mediums such as floppy disks, hard disk drives, and read/write (R/W) compact disc read only memories (CD-ROMs) or digital versatile discs (DVDs), and transmission type mediums such as digital and analog communications links.

Although the present invention has been described in detail, those skilled in the art will understand that various changes, substitutions, and alterations herein may

be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention in its broadest form.